



Review

Halal stunning and slaughter: Criteria for the assessment of dead animals

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ABSTRACT

The debate surrounding the acceptability of stunning for Halal slaughter is one that is likely to linger. Compared to a couple of decades or so ago, one may argue that pre-slaughter stunning is becoming a popular practice during Halal slaughter due to the increasing number of Muslim-majority countries who continue to issue religious rulings (*Fatwa*) to approve the practice. Concerns have often, however been raised about the likelihood of some animals dying as a result of stunning and whether there are mechanisms in place to identify and remove dead animals stunned with irreversible techniques before their necks are cut. This paper reviews literature about what makes meat Halal, considers the arguments put forward by proponents and opponents of pre-slaughter stunning for Halal production and examines the criteria used by Halal Certification Bodies to identify and reject animals that may die as a result of irreversible stunning and considers the specific risks of waterbath stunning (for poultry) from a Halal viewpoint.

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1. Introduction

The slaughter of animals for followers of the Islamic faith is both ethically and economically important due to the huge demand for animals slaughtered in this manner, and the insistence by some Muslim groups that animals be slaughtered whilst they are fully conscious. The global demand for meat slaughtered for Muslim consumption is significant and it is projected to grow even stronger (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2011; Sunkar, 2008; Mintel,

2009; The Economist, 2009). A study commissioned by Thomson Reuters in conjunction with Dinar Standard, dubbed The State of the Global Islamic Economy Report (Thomson Reuters and Dinar Standard, 2013) indicated that the amount of money spent by Muslim consumers on Halal food and drinks represents 16.6% of the global expenditure on food and drinks. This equates to approximately \$1.1 trillion and it is estimated that by the year 2018, the value could reach \$1.6 trillion. Due to the apparent economic benefits of the Halal market, many food businesses in the West have entered into the trade of Halal food products. Nestle, one of the world's major food manufacturers now holds Halal certification for an estimated 150 manufacturing sites globally (Thomson Reuters and Dinar Standard, 2013).

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For meat to be considered fit for Muslim consumption, Islamic law, the *Shariah*, requires that the animal must have been reared under conditions conducive to express normal behaviour, and that the slaughter of such animals must be performed in a humane manner. The *Shariah* law is derived from the *Qur'an* (Islamic Holy Book) and *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet of Islam, Mohammed). The following *Hadith* (*Ahadith*—plural) is one of a number of *Ahadith* that emphasise the protection of the welfare of animals during Halal slaughter:

"Verily Allah has prescribed Ihsan in all things. So if you kill then kill well, and if you slaughter, then slaughter well. Let each one of you sharpen his blade and let him spare suffering to the animal he slaughters."

[Sahih Muslim, 40 Hadith Hawawi 17]

One of the most important conditions that must be met for meat to be considered Halal is that the animal must be alive at the time of slaughter; some Muslims however insist that animals must be conscious at the time of slaughter. This has led to debate among Islamic jurists as to whether modern slaughter technologies such as pre-slaughter and post-slaughter stunning, mechanical slaughter and thoracic sticking can be accepted as part of Halal slaughter. Stunning in particular has attracted a lot of interest from animal welfare proponents due to its proven ability to minimise pain by rendering animals immediately insensible to pain. Opponents of pre-slaughter stunning for Halal production have always maintained that the practice contravenes Islamic *Shariah* law since the Prophet did not use such a technology and that there is the possibility that some animals may die as a consequence of the stun. Proponents of pre-slaughter stunning for Halal production on the other hand have argued that if stunning is proven to minimise the pain associated with the neck-cut, and the method of stunning does not result in the death of animals before slaughter, then stunning may be accepted as a Halal compliant procedure.

This review will consider the arguments surrounding the acceptability of stunning during Halal slaughter and examine the relevant Islamic scriptures to ascertain whether Islamic law explicitly outlaws stunning during Halal slaughter. The paper also looks at the criteria used by Halal Certification Bodies (HCBs) to identify and reject animals that may die as a consequence of the stun and examines whether these criteria provide an accurate diagnosis of death.

2. Halal slaughter

The word Halal is an Arabic term that means anything or act that is permissible in accordance with *Shariah* law. The slaughter of animals for Muslim consumption, sometimes referred to as *Zabiha/Dhabihah* must meet certain conditions specified in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. The following verse of the *Qur'an* commands Muslims to consume only Halal food, many Muslims therefore regard eating Halal meat as a form of worship:

"O you who have believed, eat from the good (i.e. lawful) things which We have provided for you and be grateful to God if it is (indeed) He that you worship".

[*Qur'an*, 2:172]

Not all foods are permissible to Muslims. The following verse outlines what is considered Halal and what is forbidden (*Haram*) for Muslims to consume, it is important to note that at the latter part of the verse, God has made it clear that these dietary laws do not apply in situations of genuine need:

"Prohibited to you are dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than God, and [those animals] killed by strangling or by a violent blow or by a head-long fall or by the goring of horns, and those from which a wild animal has eaten, except what you [are able to] slaughter [before its death], and those which are sacrificed on stone altars, and [prohibited is] that you seek decision

through divining arrows. That is grave disobedience. This day those who disbelieve have despaired of [defeating] your religion; so fear them not, but fear Me. This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islam as religion. But whoever is forced by severe hunger with no inclination to sin – then indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful".

[*Qur'an*, 5:3]

It is important to note that it is contrary to Islamic teachings for a Muslim to declare any food, or in fact anything as *Haram* unless it is explicitly prohibited by God (*Qur'an*, 16:116). Muslims who act in contrast to the above verse are regarded as idolatry worshippers as seen in the following verses:

"If God had willed, we would not have associated (anything) and neither would our fathers, nor would we have prohibited anything. Likewise, did those before deny until they tasted our punishment. Say, do you have any knowledge that you can produce for us? You follow not except assumption, and you are not but falsifying".

[*Qur'an*, 6:148]

"Say (O Mohammed): Bring forward your witnesses who will testify that God has forbidden this. And if they testify, do not testify with them. And do not follow the desire of those who deny our verses and those who do not believe in the Hereafter, whilst they equate (others) with their Lord".

[*Qur'an*, 6:150]

The slaughter of animals in accordance with *Shariah* law must meet the following conditions:

- The animal must be a Halal acceptable species (MS 1500, 2009; MUI HAS 23103, 2012; HFA, 2014; HMC, 2016).
- The animal must be alive at the point of slaughter (*Qur'an*, 5:3, 6:118–119, 6:145, 16:115).
- The name of Allah must be pronounced during slaughter (*Qur'an*, 6:118–119, 22:34, 22:36).
- The person bleeding the animal must have attained the age of discretion and he/she must be mentally stable. It is preferable that the slaughterer be a Muslim, however, the *Qur'an* permits Muslims to consume meat slaughtered by Christians and Jews (*Qur'an*, 5:5).

There are other recommendations, the omission of which does not necessarily render meat *Haram*. It must also be noted that some of these secondary requirements are almost impossible to achieve under commercial conditions, these include:

- Orientating the animal to face *Qibla* (The Grand Mosque in Mecca).
- Sharpening the blade or knife out of sight of the animal.
- Slaughtering animals out of sight of other animals and shielding animals from the sight of blood.
- Slaughtering in one single movement of the knife. This requirement is particularly difficult to achieve in cattle.

As stated above, the *Qur'an* forbids Muslims from declaring food as *Haram* unless it is clearly commanded by God. On the contrary, some Islamic jurists have declared some new slaughter technologies such as stunning, as *Haram* despite the fact that this is not mentioned in any of the scriptures. It must be noted that stunning is a relatively new technique which was discovered several centuries after the *Qur'an* was revealed, it is therefore not surprising that it is not mentioned in the scriptures. In a situation where a technology cannot be found in the scriptures, Islamic jurists must pass a judgement (*Fatwa*) as to whether that technology can be accepted as Halal or not. However, these jurists widely interpret the *Shariah* law differently (Fuseini, Knowles, Lines, Hadley, & Wotton, 2016).

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